



TWIN CITY LINES

WINTER 2012

FORT SNELLING BRIDGE  
June 18, 1909





## TWIN CITY LINES

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**Front cover:** This issue is entirely devoted to TCRT's homely, utilitarian work cars. Little noticed, they built the streetcar system and kept it running. In 1909, car #7 is working on the extension of the West 7th Street line across the new Mississippi River bridge to Fort Snelling. The old bridge in the distance couldn't accommodate streetcars. They looped on the St. Paul side of the river (one is visible on the loop) and their passengers walked across the bridge. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

**Inside front cover:** Crane car #50 is unloading coal from a gondola car towed into the Snelling Shops by another work car.

**Above:** In 1905, the construction of the Selby Tunnel to replace the slow and expensive counterweight system is well underway. Work car #9 is one of the first group of double truck work cars built at 31st Street Shops in 1904. Minnesota Historical Society collection.



## Work Car Extravaganza

-Aaron Isaacs

There was much more to running a streetcar system than just running streetcars. For over 40 years, from 1890 to 1933, TCRT added new track almost every year. The existing track and overhead wire required constant maintenance and sometimes replacement. Supplies had to move from the main storehouse at Snelling Shops to the streetcar stations. Grass along the private right of way required mowing, and dirt streets sprinkling. On-street collisions had to be cleaned up. Streetcars under repair needed pushing around Snelling Shops. Loaded freight cars had to be switched to and from the Milwaukee Road interchange at the edge of the property. All these behind-the-scenes chores gave rise to a large fleet of non-revenue work cars.

While the streetcars were designed with esthetic attractiveness in mind, few things were more homely and purely functional than work cars. Most were simple boxes on a flatcar body, and with few exceptions were painted a drab boxcar red. For this article we'll ignore the yellow snowplows and the sand cars that assisted them. They received their due in the Winter 2011 issue.

No streetcar system was more self-sufficient than TCRT, and the construction of non-revenue rolling stock was no exception. Of the 70 purpose-built work cars beginning in 1904, only eight were purchased from an outside manufacturer. The rest were built in TCRT's 31st Street or Snelling Shops.

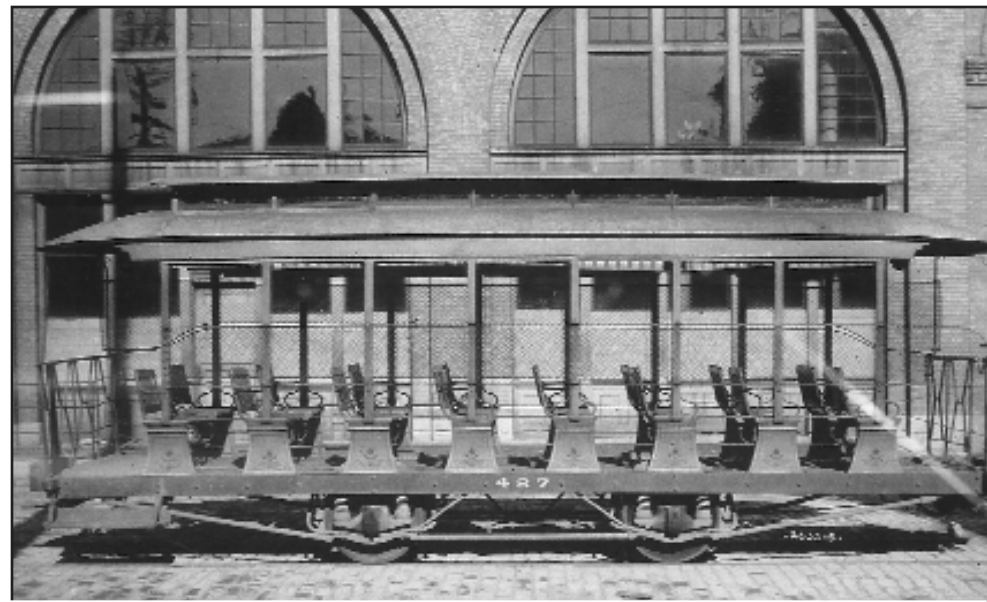
There were basically three generations of work cars and their numbers grew along with the streetcar system. The period 1890-1905 was one of experimentation, of learning what was required to keep a transit system running. Like the earliest streetcars, the first work cars were rather small and primitive and were eventually replaced by bigger, sturdier, more powerful equipment.

Our knowledge of the early work equipment is not complete. We have

access to a 1904 inventory. That's timely, as the first of the second generation of home-built work cars emerged from the 31st Street Shops in November 1904.

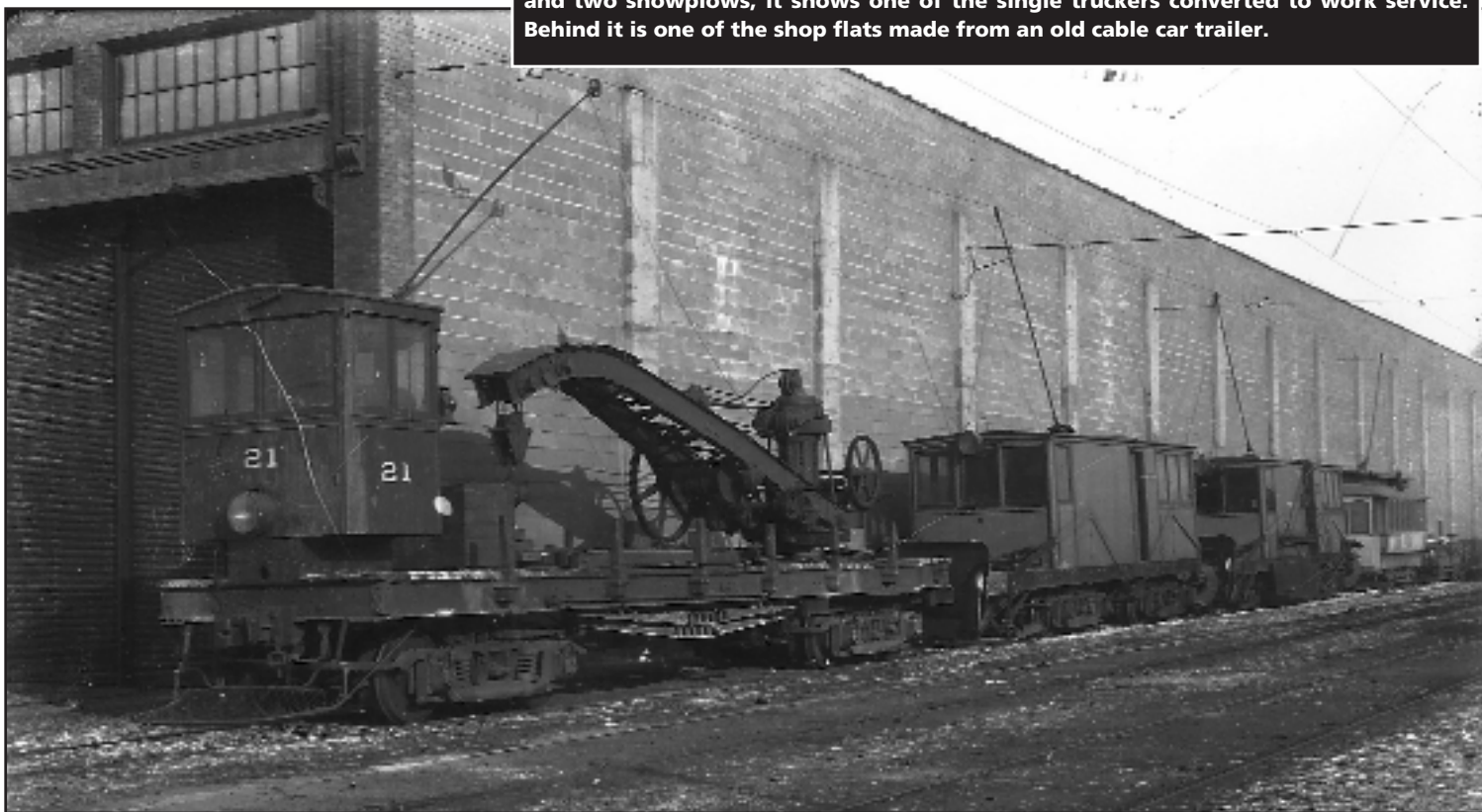
TCRT began building its signature double-truck streetcars in 1898. Each one replaced a single truck two-car motor-trailer train. By 1902 there were 155 double truckers in service and it was possible to start retiring the oldest trailers, which had been built as horse cars. From 1902 to 1904, the second generation began, when five of them were converted to salters, used to sprinkle ice-melting salt on the rails. One became a sander, also for use in icy conditions.

By March 1905, the double truck streetcar fleet was up to 354 and single truck streetcars were being rapidly phased out. With so many on hand, TCRT embraced a common industry practice and began converting quite a few to work service. 35 of them became sand cars, switchers, wreckers, ash cars, and flats for the Track Department. Photos of them are rare (see below).

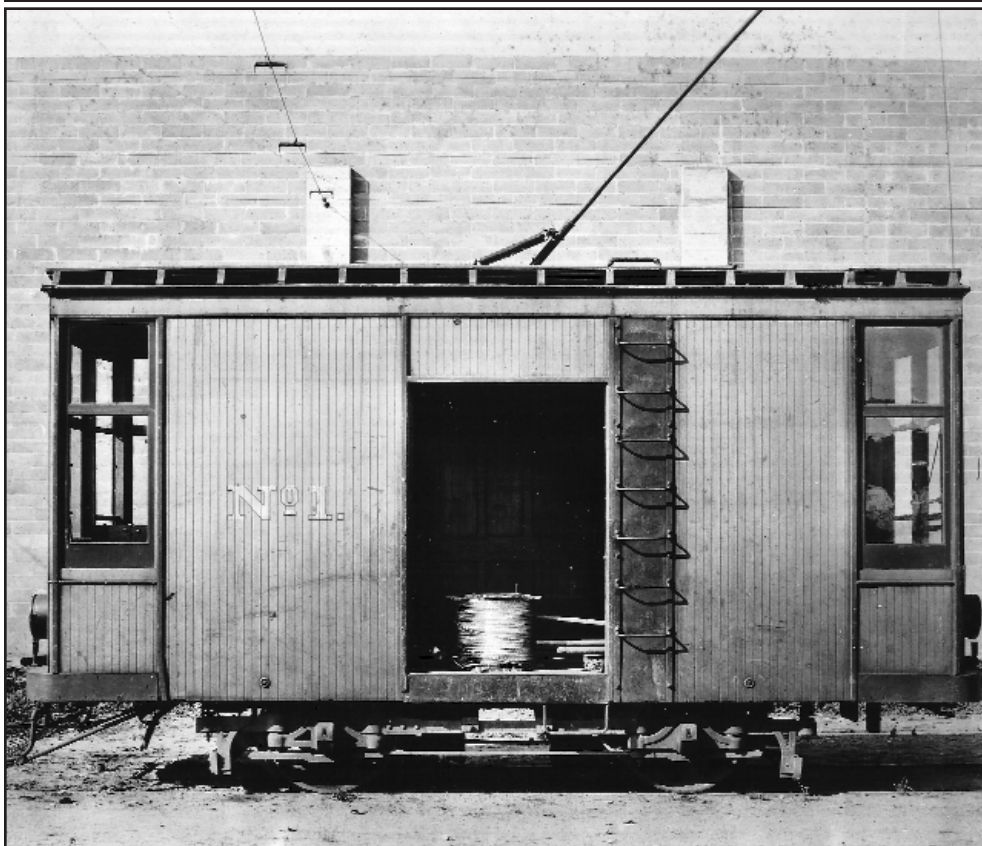
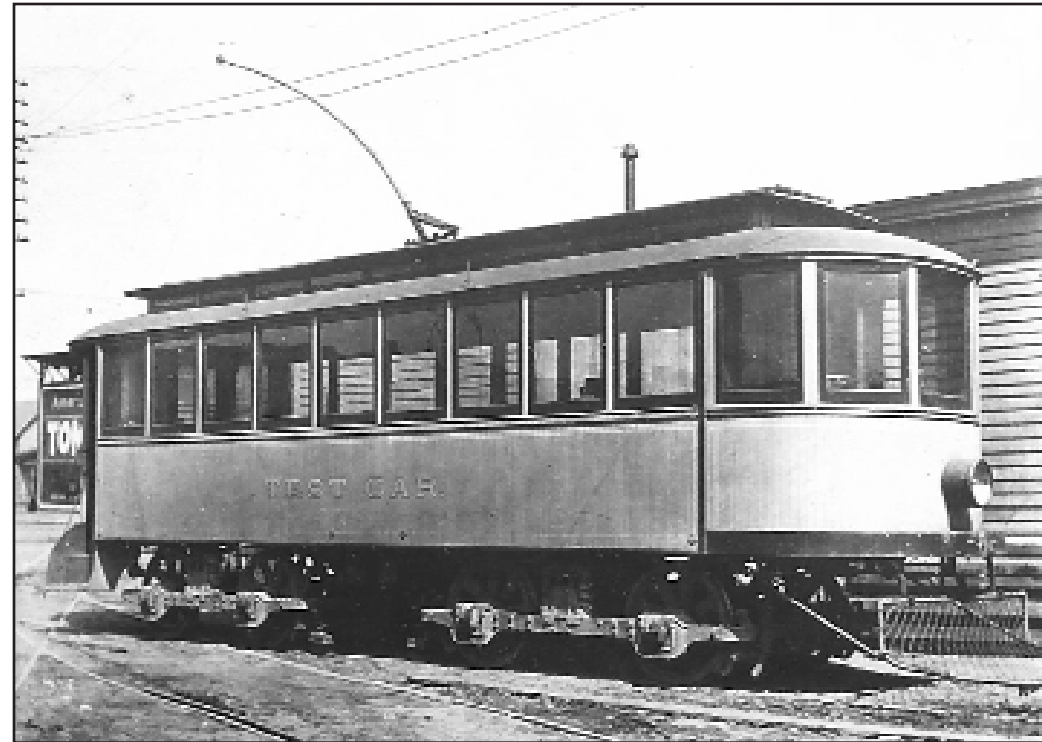
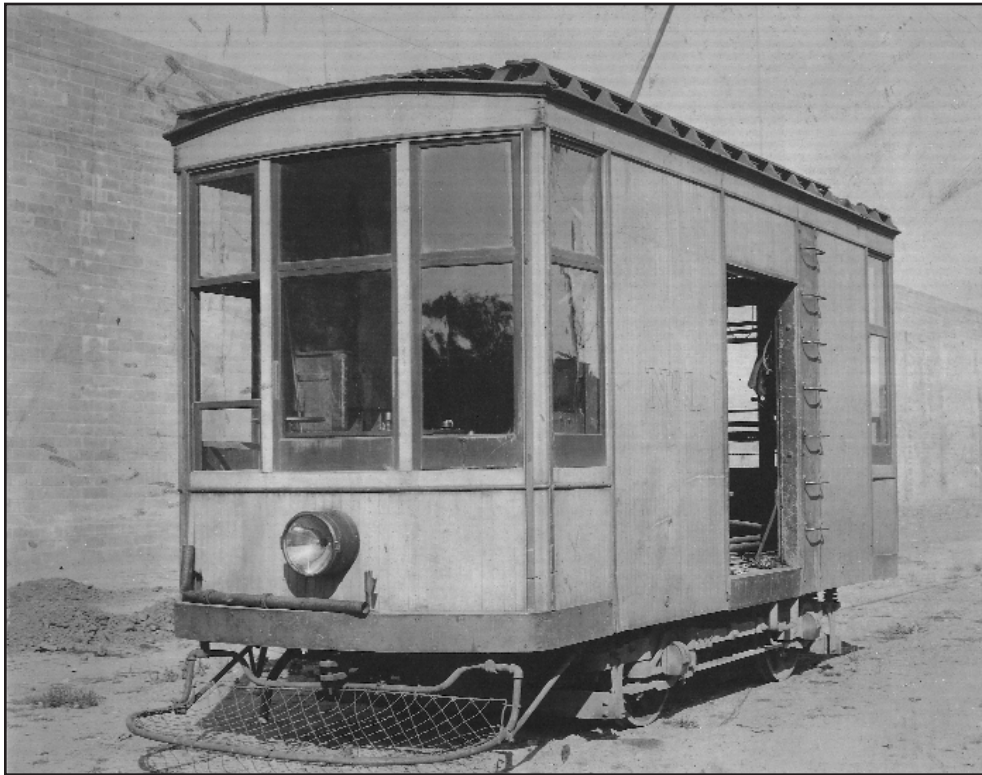


**Photos of the earliest work cars are not common. Open trailer #427 (pictured above in 1904) was converted to a Track Department work trailer in 1906 and scrapped in 1912.**

**(Below) This lineup at Snelling Station dates from about 1909. Besides derrick car #21 and two snowplows, it shows one of the single truckers converted to work service. Behind it is one of the shop flats made from an old cable car trailer.**



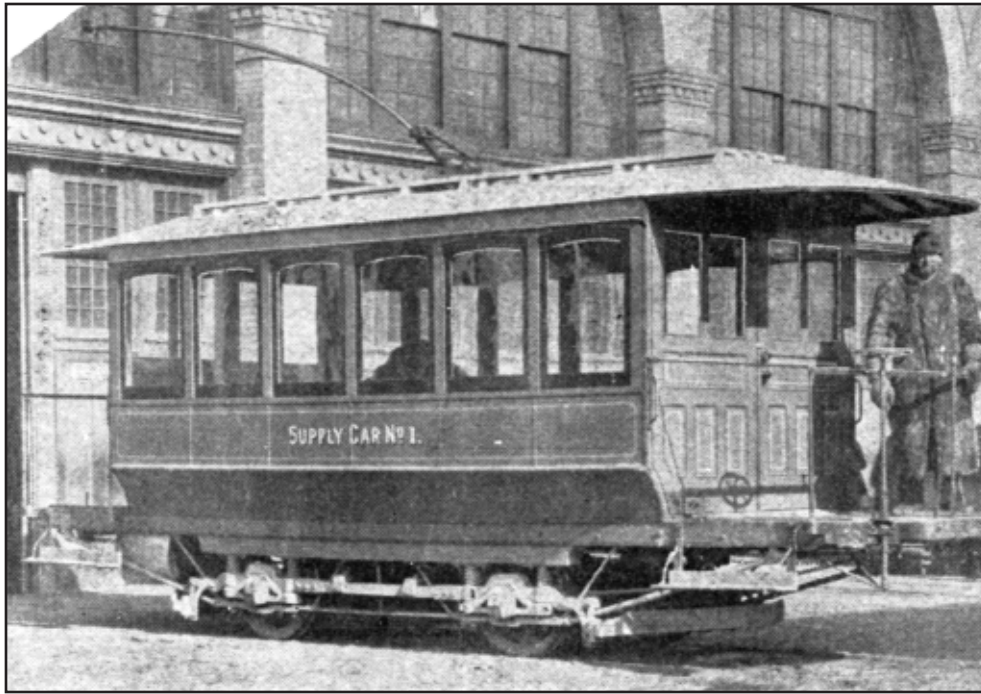




At left is wire car #1, built by TCRT in the 1890s. With only a single truck and no adjustable roof platform, it was soon obsolete and was scrapped in 1910. (Above and below) Five of the 1892-built cars acquired with the North St. Paul Railroad in 1898 were recycled as work cars. In 1904 #796 was turned into a rail bond connectivity test car. It was scrapped in 2012. Car #794 had its rear vestibule removed, becoming shop flat #42, show here in the Snelling Shops east yard.







#### SUPPLY CARS

Minneapolis Street Railway built the first supply car, (above left) single trucker #1, in 1891. It is shown outside the original powerhouse/office building on 3rd Avenue N. at 2nd Street. It was joined sometime in the 1890s by #2 (above) a double trucker built as a demonstrator by Northern Car Company of Robbinsdale. It wasn't repeated and a baggage door was cut in its side. It was replaced by a second supply car #2 (below) created from 1899-built streetcar #762. It was retired in 1936 along with most of the other wood framed passenger cars.

Looking back, converting single truck passenger cars, the second generation of work cars, was a stopgap measure to support a rapidly expanding streetcar system. The cars themselves were near the end of their useful lives, and lacked the speed and capacity of double truck cars. In fact, the construction of new, custom-built double truck work cars had already begun in 1904, a year before the first single truck streetcars were converted. Most of the single truck work cars were retired after only five or six years, by 1912. During that time, TCRT built 27 new double truckers designed as work cars from the ground up.

Because of the influx of new cars and converted single truckers, the work car roster swelled from 29 in 1904 to 73 in 1907. By the end of 1912, with the retirement of most of the single truckers, that number had dropped to 42. However, because the system was still growing at a rapid rate, TCRT built 26 more new work cars through 1917. The work car roster grew to 67, and it stayed pretty close to that number until abandonment in the 1950s.

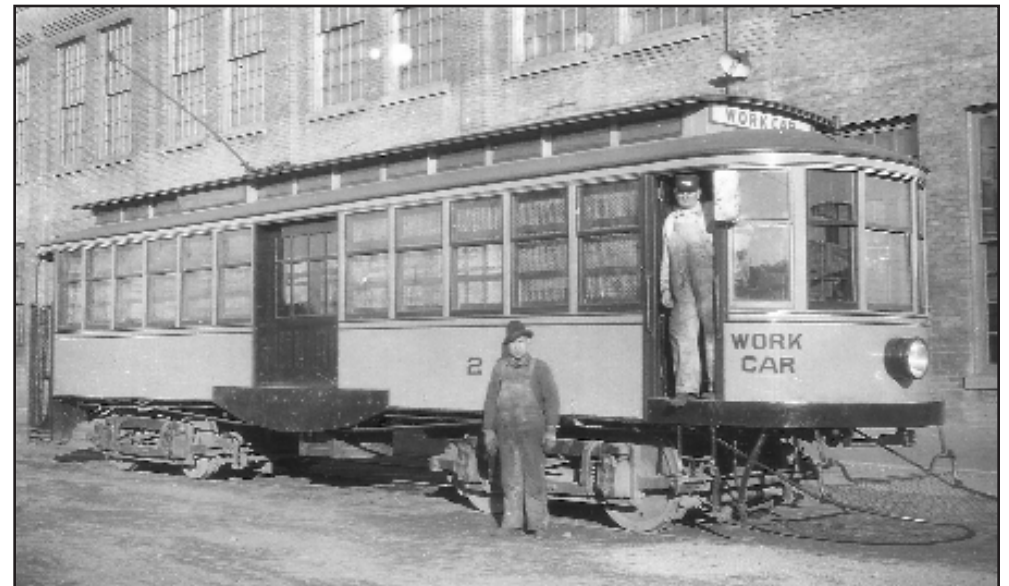
The majority of the purpose-built work cars, 31 in all, were designed for general use. All were motorized flatcars

with a small wood operator's cab at one end. Most had low, hinged wood side panels. They could be loaded with rail or other track materials. When raised, the side panels permitted loose commodities like gravel, salt, sand and coal to be loaded.

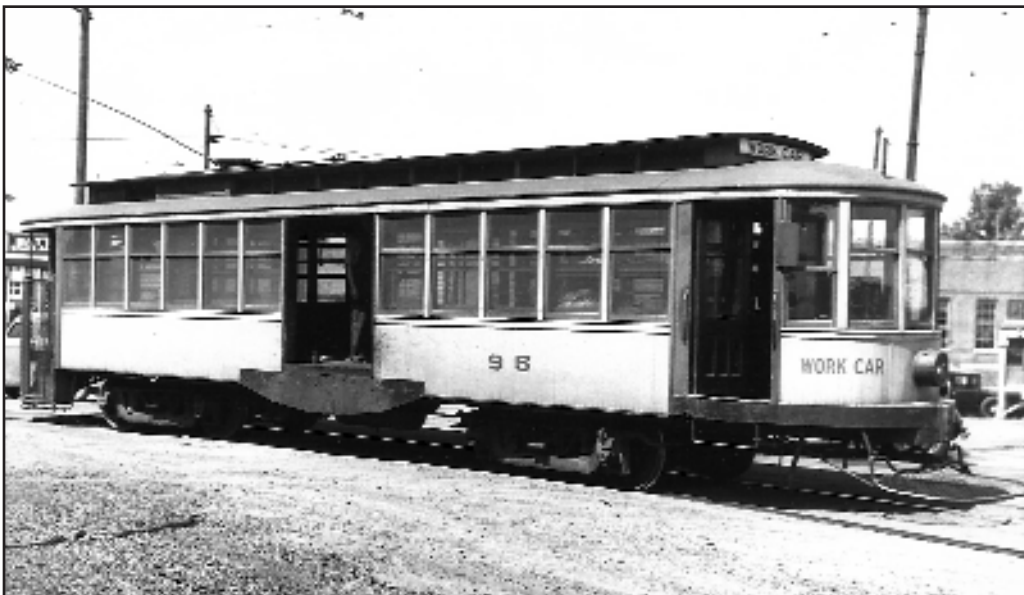
A note about car numbering: In the beginning, there were duplicate numbers for wreckers, work cars, wire cars, oil cars, supply cars, snow plows and shop trailers. This created confusion as there were seven different number ones, and so on. When TCRT began building its new generation of work cars in 1904, it placed them all in a single numbering system starting with #3, which happened to be a wire car. Generally, they were numbered in order of construction, and this continued through supply car #97, which appeared in 1947.

Several of the cars were outfitted with special equipment. For example, car 46 carried a weed cutter for mowing private right of way, and a separate headlight to illuminate the mower for night work.

There was a limit to the tasks the general purpose cars could perform, which led to a number of specialized cars.







The replacement for supply car #2 was steel framed #95, originally 1905 passenger car #1134. Originally retaining its yellow color scheme, it was later painted work car tuscan red. It is parked at the Snelling storehouse dock about 1945. TCRT didn't normally let paint deteriorate like this. Gene Corbey photo.



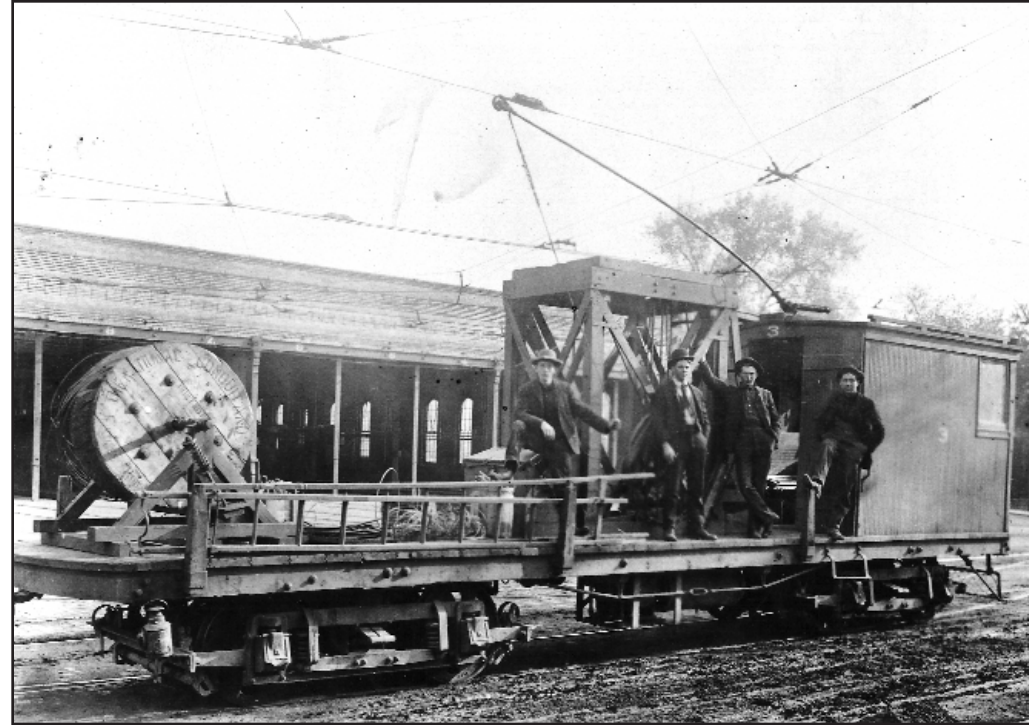
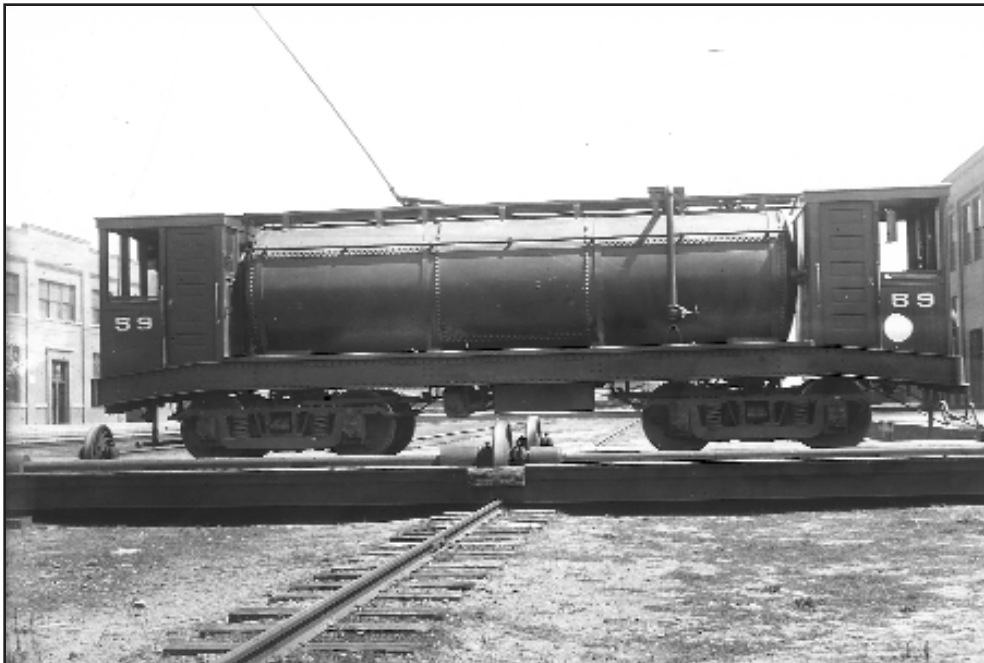
In 1947 #95 was replaced by supply car #97, made from 1909 car #1349. Kirt Blewett photographed it at the storehouse. It made delivery runs to each station one day per week. The schedule was Monday to Lake Street Station, Tuesday to Nicollet and Snelling Stations, Wednesday to North Side, Thursday to East Side and Friday to Duluth Avenue. (Below) Leaving the Minneapolis end of the Lake Street bridge, it is headed for either Nicollet or Lake Street. Art Rusterholz photo.







Sprinkler #59 was the only such car in the fleet. Presumably it was used to keep the dust down on dirt streets, a requirement of the city franchises. It lasted until the end of service.



Wire car #3 had a long career, from 1905 to 1954. An early view (above) shows it in the Minnesota Historical Society collection.

(Below) On Water Street in Excelsior with the tower extended.

(Above right) On the Minnetonka line, with what appears to be the Minneapolis, No. 3, rear and equipped with the longer, swing out platform. Hopkins Historical Society collection.







in front of East Side Station with its original tower, that was located amidships.

Northfield & Southern overpass in the distance. Note the new tower relocated to the collection.

, located at the northeastern corner of Snelling Shops.



#### WIRE CARS

Wire cars looked similar to regular work cars, but differed primarily by having a tower in the middle or rear of the car that could be raised and swung to one side or the other to service the overhead wire. The cars were permanently equipped with the tools and supplies peculiar to wire work. The two original wire cars were single truckers that lasted until 1910 and 1912 respectively (see page 4). TCRT built double truck wire cars 3 and 4 in 1905, added #5 in 1908, and #72 in 1917. In 1909 car #33, which lacked a tower, was built to service the many miles of underground conduit. Cars 3 and 4 were based in Minneapolis and cars 5 and 72 in St. Paul. Even though the system grew after 1917, no more wire cars were added. Instead, TCRT began buying wire trucks. By being able to drive on and off the tracks at any location other than private right of way, the wire trucks could make repairs quicker, with less disruption to scheduled service.

(Above) Car #33 at Nicollet Station. Note the depressed track for coal deliveries.



Crane car #50 was built in 1913. In 1947 it received a new crane, shown removing track on Rondo in 1948.



Crane car #74 stayed at Snelling. It is shown working the rail pile. (Below) Car #83 is removing rail, probably during the 1952 abandonment of most St. Paul lines.







The trio of Thew shovels could travel on road wheels or rails. At left in 1920, #60 is preparing 8th Street next to Dayton's Department Store for track construction. Did it run off the power cord hanging from the rear of the cab? Minnesota Historical Society collection.

(Above) In 1947, one of the Thews works on the Nicollet Avenue line extension from 58th to 62nd Street.

#### CRANE CARS

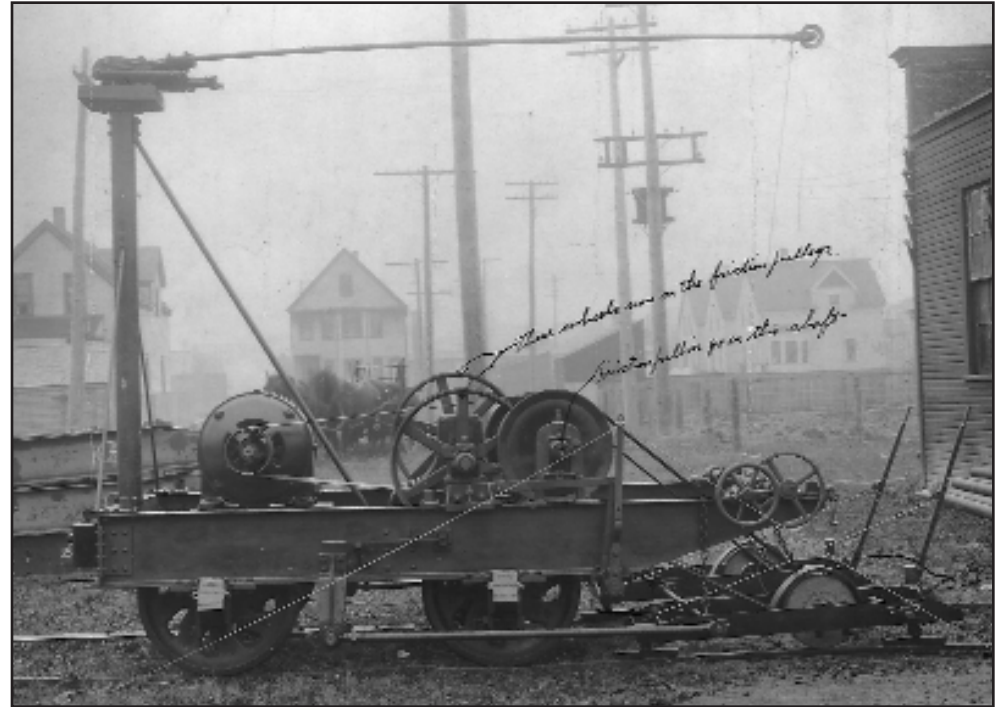
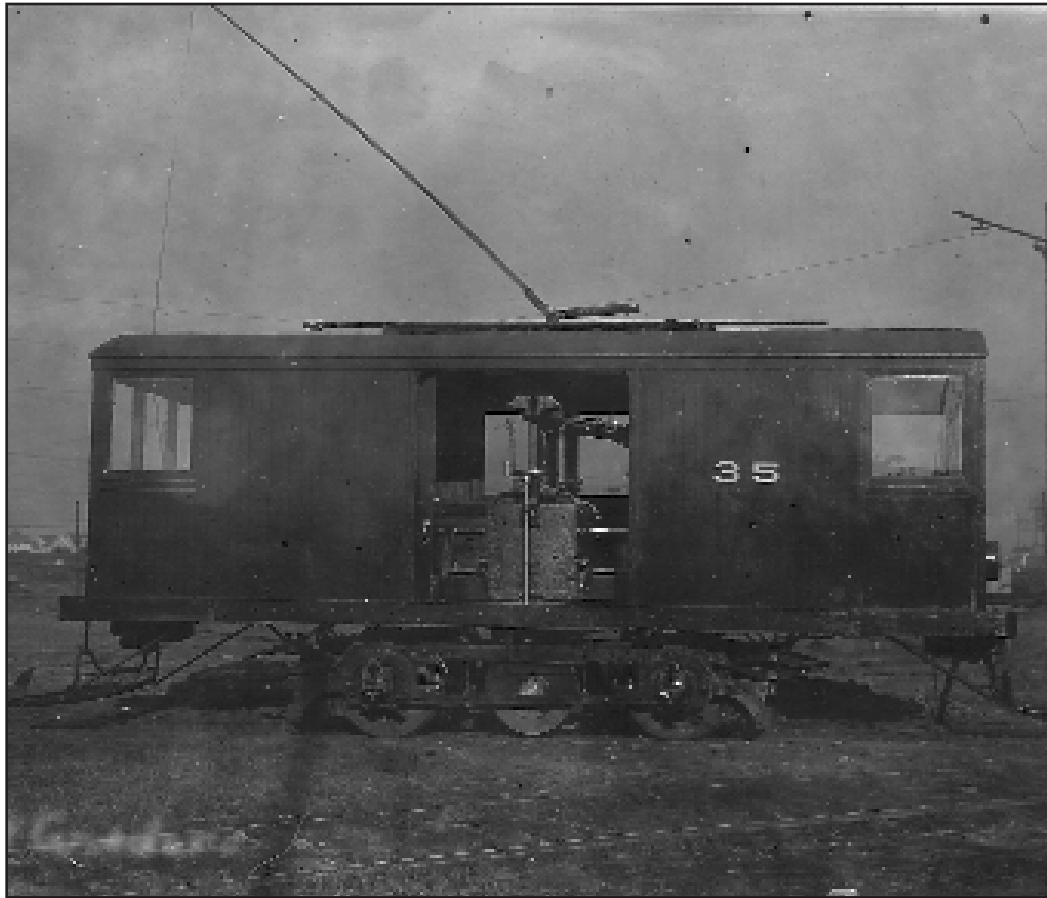
There were four crane cars. Three of them, #21, 50 and 83, were built in TCRT shops and were conventional flatbed work cars with a small cab on one end, an open deck area and the crane mounted over the rear truck. Car 50 was equipped with a bucket useful for unloading coal and gravel from railroad cars. The last, #74, was built by Brown Hoisting, later known as Industrial Brownhoist. It was an electric version of a typical railroad self-powered crane, and spent its career working for the Track department at the east end of the Snelling complex.

#### Electric shovels

The first three electric shovels (#57, 60 and 73) were all built by Thew Automatic Shovel of Lorain, Ohio, from 1915 to 1917. A fourth shovel, #94, was built by Speeder of Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1929. All four shovels had flanged wheels for on-rail operation, as well as tracks or wheels for movement on pavement.

(Right) Speeder-built shovel #94 is on 1st Avenue N. at 5th Street with work car #55. Note the flanged wheels on the rails inside the treads. Cliff Scholes collection.





(Above) A Kerwin rail grinder, as delivered and (below left) at work on the 62nd and Nicollet track extension in 1947. Hennepin County Historical Society collection.







#### RAIL GRINDERS

TCRT built its first rail grinder, car #35 (top left) in 1909. Apparently it wasn't successful, because it was converted to a sand blasting car in 1911.

The next grinders appeared in 1911, #39 and 40, built by Kerwin Manufacturing. They lasted until 1952. In 1938, former high speed suburban car #1261 became rail grinder #96. Its obvious advantage over the Kerwins was that it didn't have to be towed.

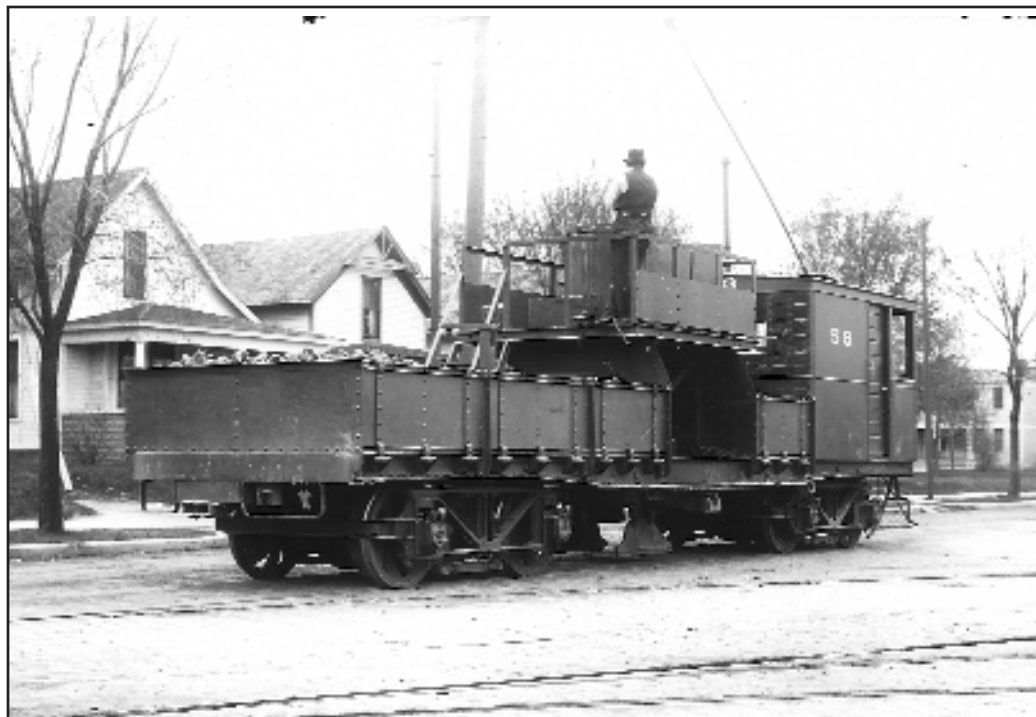
(Left) Rail grinder #96 was based at Nicollet Station, in front of the former Motor Line roundhouse wing that housed the Minneapolis track department.

(Above) The grinder pads. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo.

(Right) The air powered controls inside #96. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo.







#### CUPOLA RAIL WELDING CARS

Cars #58 and 61 were built in 1914-15 to perform thermite rail welding. They lasted until 1925, when smaller portable welding units were developed. The cars were rebuilt with full-length box bodies. They were assigned to the Track department for hauling supplies and lasted until the 1950s.

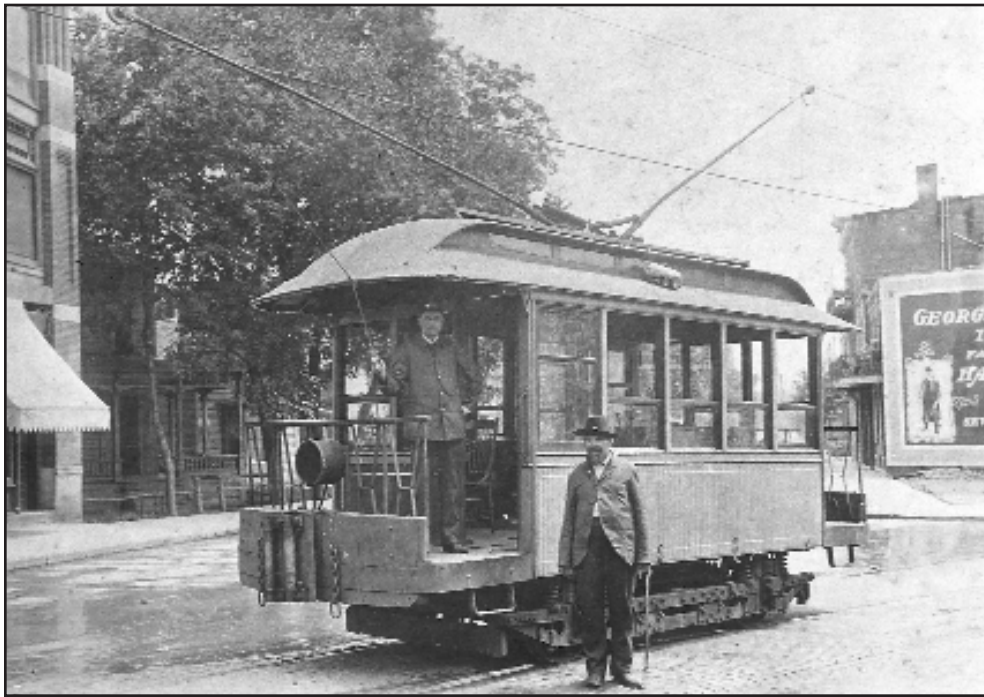
(Below) In its later years as a supply car, #61 is carrying bags of cement and hauling a cement mixer. Cliff Scholes collection.

#### SHOP SHIFTERS

Every shop needs a small locomotive to move disabled vehicles around the complex. If a turntable or transfer table is involved, the unit must be small enough to fit on it along with whatever it is towing. Snelling Shops was a big place, so TCRT decided it needed three shifters. Although there were plenty of surplus single truck streetcars available, TCRT selected the three 1890 ex-cable cars that had been modified to push streetcars up the Selby Hill counterweight, the last vestige of the former cable line. They were equipped with motors, and the bodies had been reinforced. Drawbars were added for pushing and pulling streetcars and detached trucks. The shifters received new bodies in 1943. At abandonment, they were the oldest rolling stock in the system.







(Above) One of the shifters as it appeared while still in counterweight service before 1906.  
 (Below) Note the drawbars that could be used to move detached trucks around the shops.



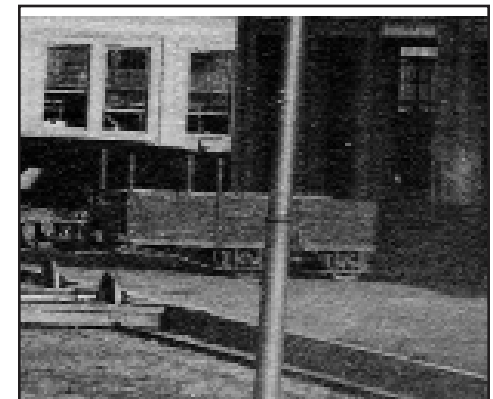
(Above) Two of the shifters received new bodies in 1943. Robert Selle photo.  
 (Below) Their short bodies allowed the shifters to squeeze onto the transfer table with a streetcar, in this case an incomplete lightweight car being moved between shop buildings.







There were some additional small shop trailers on conventional handcar frames. This is inside the Machine Shop.

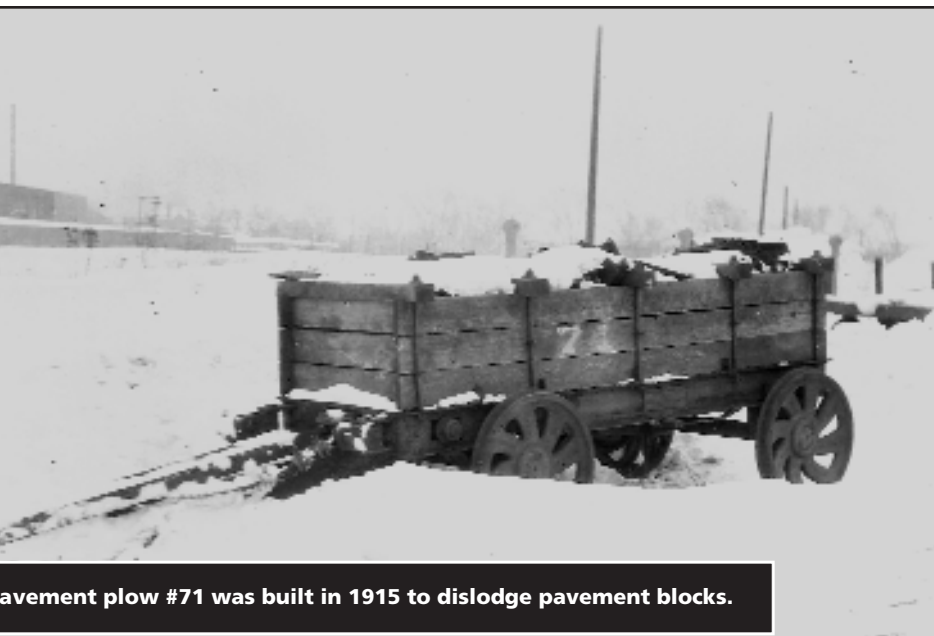


#### SHOP TRAILERS

31st Street Shops and later Snelling Shops needed utility trailers to transport materials around the property. Between 1906 and 1911 they constructed ten simple 4-wheel wood flatcars, some with wood sides, using the trucks and frames of retired cable car trailers. At some point they were either replaced with newer cars, or renumbered 84-93; which is unclear. Most survived until 1952.



(Below) Photos of the trailers are rare. The most detailed is this scrapping scene from 1952. Robert Selle photo.



Pavement plow #71 was built in 1915 to dislodge pavement blocks.



A few of the standard work cars were customized with special purpose equipment.

(Above) Car #48 was assigned to Owen Street Station in Stillwater where it doubled as the wrecker, sand car and wire car, receiving a rear cab and deck sand bin in the process.

(Below left) Car #46 was set up to mow private right of way at night, hence the mower attachment illuminated by a downward focused headlight. Russ Olson photo.

(Below right) Car #47 lost its fold-down side panels and gained four dump boxes and two derricks to load and unload them.



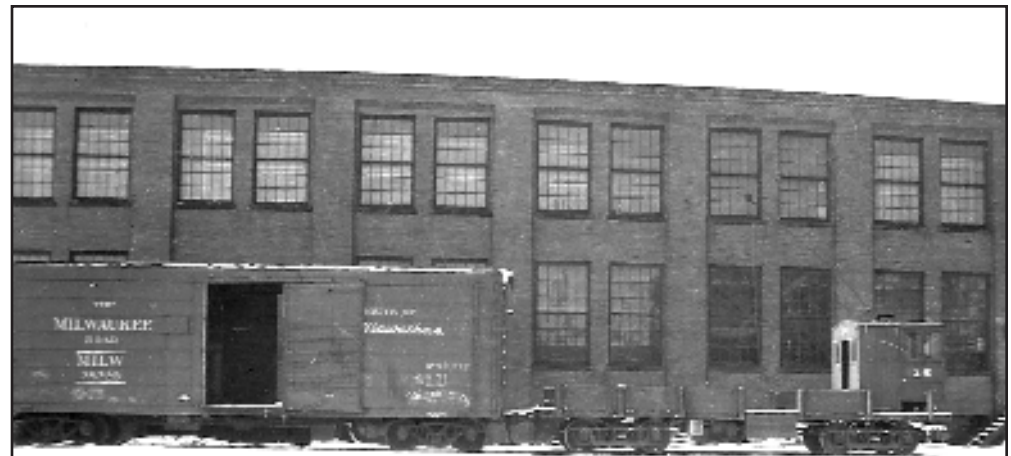




Work cars hauled coal to the carhouses from Snelling Shops and returned with ash.

(Left) This is the ash-loading facility at North Side Station.

(Below) Car #46, minus its mower attachment, with coal at Nicollet Station. The conversion to buses has begun and bus garage bays have replaced most of tracks 7-9. Robert Selle photo.



TCRT's main shops always had a direct steam railroad connection to the Milwaukee Road. We have no photos of it, but 31st Street Shops had an interchange track at 29th and Nicollet Avenue, where the streetcar crossed the railroad at grade. Snelling Shops was served by the long Midway industrial spur that also fed Montgomery Ward, Brown & Bigelow and other nearby industries. Work cars picked up loaded freight cars of coal, rail and other needed materials at the edge of the property. (Above) An empty boxcar is being pushed away from the storehouse dock. Occasionally, streetcars on flatcars entered or left, like this PCC (lower right) headed for Newark, New Jersey. Note that cars #15 and 17 have received cab extensions to accommodate extra workers.



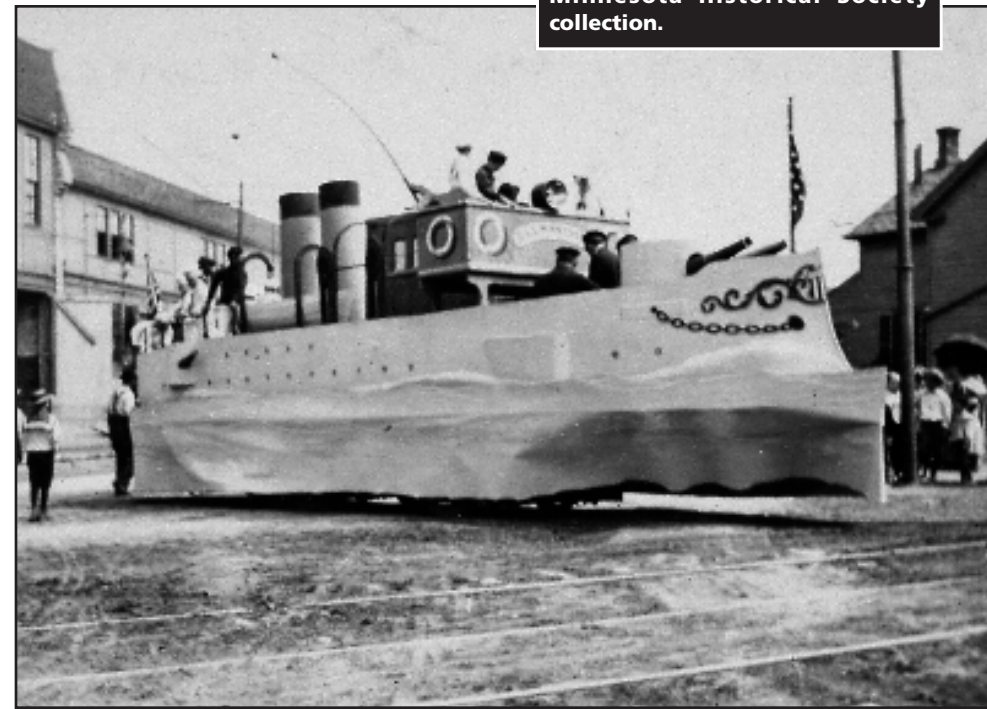




Before about 1920, track construction would have been impossible without the work cars, which filled the role of heavy trucks today. (Above left) In this scene from around 1900, one of the early snowplows, which doubled as work cars in the summer, is helping out on 4th Avenue S. between 6th and 7th Streets. Hennepin County Historical Society collection. (Above right) In 1925, workers shovel sand from the deck of car #55 during the Northern Pacific Central Avenue grade separation project in Northeast Minneapolis. Minnesota Historical Society collection.



Every dog must have its day. Witness this work car transformed into the battleship parade float USS Minnesota. The location is Smith Avenue Station in St. Paul around 1900. Minnesota Historical Society collection.



## *Twin City Rapid Transit Work Car Roster*

#	Type	Built	Builder	Retired	Assigned to	Comments
3	wire car	1905	TCRT 31st Street	1954	University substation 1930s-54	
4	wire car	1905	TCRT 31st Street	1952	Snelling 1912-41, then Duluth	
5	wire car	1908	TCRT 31st Street	1953	East Side 1912-53	
6	gondola	1910	National Dump Car	1947	Main Steam Station	
7	work car	1904	TCRT 31st Street	1954		
8	work car	1904	TCRT 31st Street	1954	Nicollet wrecker 1914-30	
9	work car	1904	TCRT 31st Street	1954		
10	work car	1904	TCRT 31st Street	1954		
11	work car	1905	TCRT 31st Street	1954	Owen St. to 1932	
12	work car	1905	TCRT 31st Street	1934	Nicollet to 1932	scrapped 1936
13	work car	1905	TCRT 31st Street	1954		
14	work car	1905	TCRT 31st Street	1954	Nicollet 1921-54	rebuilt to sand car 1925
15	work car	1905	TCRT 31st Street	1954		rebuilt after 1925 fire
16	work car	1905	TCRT 31st Street	1952	Duluth 1920-52	rebuilt to sand car 1925
17	work car	1907	TCRT 31st Street	1954		
18	work car	1907	TCRT 31st Street	1953	North Side 1920s-53	rebuilt to sand car 1925
19	work car	1907	TCRT 31st Street	1954	Lake Street wrecker	
20	locomotive	1907	TCRT 31st Street	1954	Main Steam Station	
21	wrecker-crane	1907	TCRT 31st Street	1954	Snelling til 1940s, then Nicollet	
26	shop shifter	1907	LaClede	1954	Snelling Shops	cable grip, counterweight car
27	shop shifter	1907	LaClede	1954	Snelling Shops	cable grip, counterweight car
28	shop shifter	1907	LaClede	1954	Snelling Shops	cable grip, counterweight car
33	wire crew work car	1909	TCRT Snelling	1954	Nicollet	underground wire car
35	rail grinder	1909	TCRT Snelling	1944		to sand blasting car 1911
39	rail grinder	1911	Kerwin Mfg.	1952		
40	rail grinder	1911	Kerwin Mfg.	1952		
43	sand car	1911	TCRT Snelling	1954	Duluth to 1920, then Snelling to 1954	
44	sand car	1911	TCRT Snelling	1954	Lake Street	
45	sand car	1911	TCRT Snelling	1954	East Side	
46	work car	1912	TCRT Snelling	1954		equipped with weed cutter, ca 1936
47	work car	1912	TCRT Snelling	1952	Nicollet 1940s	equipped with steel dump containers
48	work car	1912	TCRT Snelling	1952	Owen St. to 1932, North Side to 1952	
49	refuse car	1913	TCRT Snelling	1954		
50	crane car	1913	TCRT Snelling	1954		crane replaced 1947
51	work car	1914	TCRT Snelling	1954		
52	work car	1914	TCRT Snelling	1953		



#	Type	Built	Builder	Retired	Assigned to	Comments
53	work car	1914	TCRT Snelling	1954		
54	work car	1914	TCRT Snelling	1954		
55	work car	1914	TCRT Snelling	1954		
56	work car	1914	TCRT Snelling	1954		
57	electric shovel	1915	Thew Electric Shovel	1952	Snelling	
58	cupola car	1914	TCRT Snelling	1954	Track Dept.	rebuilt as supply car 1925
59	sprinkler car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1952		
60	electric shovel	1915	Thew Electric Shovel	1948		
61	cupola car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	Track Dept.	rebuilt as supply car 1925
62	work car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	Snelling	ash car
63	work car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	Snelling 1934-54	ash car
64	work car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	North Side 1934-53	ash car
65	work car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	Duluth, then Lake St. 1934-53	ash car
66	work car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	Nicollet	ash car
67	work car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	Duluth 1935-52	ash car
68	work car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	East Side	ash car
69	work car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1954	Snelling Shops	ash car
70	sand blasting car	1915	TCRT Snelling	1945		
71	pavement plow	1915	TCRT Snelling	1952		
72	wire car	1917	TCRT Snelling	1954	Owen St. to 1932, then Duluth, Snelling	
73	electric shovel	1917	Thew Electric Shovel	1954	Snelling	
74	yard crane	1917	Brown Hoisting	1954	Snelling	
83	crane car	1927	Differential	1954	Snelling	
84	shop trailer	1907	TCRT Snelling	1952	Snelling Shops	
85	shop trailer	1907	TCRT Snelling	1952	Snelling Shops	
86	shop trailer	1907	TCRT Snelling	1952	Snelling Shops	
87	shop trailer	1907	TCRT Snelling	1952	Snelling Shops	
88	shop trailer	1907	TCRT Snelling	1939	Snelling Shops	
89	shop trailer	1908	TCRT Snelling	1953	Snelling Shops	
90	shop trailer	1910	TCRT Snelling	1942	Snelling Shops	
91	shop trailer	1911	TCRT Snelling	1952	Snelling Shops	
92	shop trailer	?	TCRT Snelling	1952	Snelling Shops	
93	shop trailer	?	TCRT Snelling	1952	Snelling Shops	
94	electric shovel	1929	Speeder	1954	Snelling	
95	supply car	1936	TCRT 31st Street	1947	Snelling Shops	built as passenger car 1134 1905
96	rail grinder	1938	TCRT 31st Street	1952		built as passenger car 1261 1907
97	supply car	1947	TCRT Snelling	1954	Snelling Shops	passenger car 1349 1909

In 1949, a streetcar company service truck has been upended in a crash at Snelling Avenue and Minnehaha Avenue, and is being retrieved by crane car #83. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.





In 1950 the Broadway crosstown line was abandoned across the Mississippi River. Streetcar company crews are removing the tracks and paving blocks as part of rebuilding the Broadway bridge. Look closely and you can see that the work car is not under overhead wire. It appears to have been pushed into place by the TCRT service truck in front of it. Note also the TCRT wire truck at left. Minneapolis Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.









# MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

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August 2021

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